Temporal and benefactive for-phrases prime differently: Evidence against phrase structural accounts of persistence

Introduction

• Speakers tend to parallel linguistic structures in consecutive utterances (= Structural Persistence; Bock, 1986). This phenomenon is ascribed to priming of representations that are involved in sentence production.

Hypotheses:

• Priming of phrase structural representations (e.g., Bock & Loebell, 1990); for example, of ditrans. constructions (NP V NP PP vs. NP V NP NP)

• Priming of conceptual representations (e.g., Pappert & Pechmann, 2014); for example, of the linearization of thematic roles (theme before recipient or vice versa)

• We conducted a structural priming experiment in German to pin down the type of representation that gets primed.

Results

Primes:

for-BEN: Der Zirkusdirektor öffnet den Vorhang für den Clown.  (The circus director opens the curtain for the clown.)

DAT-BEN: Der Zirkusdirektor öffnet dem Clown den Vorhang.  (The circus director opens the clown the curtain.)

for-TEMP: Der Zirkusdirektor öffnet den Vorhang für zehn Sekunden.  (The circus director opens the curtain for ten seconds.)

TR: Der Zirkusdirektor öffnet den Vorhang.  (The circus director opens the curtain.)

Target: mieten (‘rent’) Regisseur (‘director’) Strandhaus (‘beach house’) / Filmstar (‘movie star’)

• N_valid = 559 (59% for-BEN), 24 items, 48 participants

• main effects of Prime Structure and Target Noun Order; no interaction

Comparisons of factor levels for Prime Structure:

for-BEN ≠ DAT-BEN (p < .001)

for-BEN ≠ for-TEMP (p < .01)

for-BEN ≠ TR (p < .01)

DAT-BEN ≠ for-TEMP (p = .03)

DAT-BEN ≠ TR (p = .02)

for-TEMP = TR (p = .89)

Discussion

• Participants showed structural persistence in benefactives but they did not parallel for-temporals and for-benefactives, although those are superficially identical in phrase structure.

• There was no evidence for the additivity of conceptual level and phrase structural priming.

• Thus, the findings speak against an account of structural persistence that relies on priming of phrase structural representations (e.g., Bock & Loebell, 1990; Pickering & Branigan, 1998).

• Approaches are supported that suggest priming at the conceptual level or of the subsequent procedural representations that map conceptual categories to syntactic structure (Pappert & Pechmann, 2014; Baumann, Pappert & Pechmann, submitted).

• In addition, the outcome highlights a division between meaning- and form-related mechanisms in sentence production (cf., Bock et al., 1992).

References


